

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

December 12, 2023

Dr. Frank Pearson
Director and CEO
VA San Diego Healthcare System
3350 La Jolla Village Drive
San Diego, CA 92161

Dear Dr. Pearson,

As members of San Diego's congressional delegation, we are writing to inquire about the Housing and Urban Development-Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. Established in 2008, the HUD-VASH program provides housing vouchers and case management services for veterans experiencing homelessness. This program is particularly important to San Diego County, which is home to over 250,000 veterans, one of the largest concentrations in the country.¹ However, the *San Diego Union-Tribune* recently reported that of the 949 HUD-VASH vouchers the County of San Diego received this year, 336 were unused as of early October.²

Data collected by San Diego County show that from August 2022 to July 2023, referrals from the VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS) to the County of San Diego averaged approximately 13 per month. We recognize that VASDHS recently partnered with a non-profit organization, People Assisting the Homeless (PATH), and that this partnership has led to a marked increase in referrals—36 per month in August, September, and October of 2023 on average. However, to address veteran homelessness, we must ensure that no vouchers go unused.

VA has made significant strides in reducing veteran homelessness in recent years. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of homeless veterans in San Diego decreased from 659 in 2018 to 317 in 2020, according to the Regional Task Force on Homelessness (RTFH).² However, since the pandemic, homelessness among San Diego veterans rose to 473, according to a 2023 RTFH survey, a 49% increase from 2020.² In Congress, we are fighting to restore authorities granted to VA during the pandemic to increase transitional housing payments and provide homeless veterans with clothing, hygiene items, transportation, and more.

To better serve veterans in our region, we are requesting that VASDHS provide written responses to the following questions:

1. VASDHS has stated that a major barrier to increasing referrals to the County is the region's lack of quality, affordable units in desired locations.² Please describe these issues

¹ "VA San Diego and County Fight Veteran Homelessness," 7 July 2023. <https://www.va.gov/san-diego-health-care/news-releases/va-san-diego-and-county-fight-veteran-homelessness/>

² Nelson, Blake, "San Diego County gets housing vouchers just for homeless veterans. Hundreds aren't being used," *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 11 November 2023. <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/homelessness/story/2023-11-11/san-diego-county-gets-housing-vouchers-just-for-homeless-veterans-hundreds-arent-being-used>

in greater detail, including any challenges unique to the County compared to other public housing agencies in the region.

2. How many homeless veterans in the region have applied for a HUD-VASH voucher but have not yet been issued one?
3. Families issued a HUD-VASH voucher have at least 120 days to search for a housing unit before the voucher expires.³ Please describe how this time limit affects HUD-VASH voucher utilization, and whether VASDHS has worked with local public housing agencies to pursue potential for flexibility in the amount of time before a voucher expires.
4. What is the average amount of time between a veteran receiving a HUD-VASH housing voucher and securing housing in San Diego County?
5. What recommendations do local VA leadership have to continue the region's progress in further reducing veteran homelessness?

Thank you for your ongoing work to better the lives of San Diego's veterans, including those who struggle with homelessness. We look forward to hearing from you and working on a path towards achieving our goal of functional zero.

Sincerely,



Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Mike Levin
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress

³ "Housing Choice Voucher Program Guidebook – HUD-VASH Vouchers," July 2021.
https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/HUD_VASH_HCV_Guidebook_Chapter_July_2021.pdf